

Conversation with 40 year old black male, Ann Arbor, Michigan (Transcription)

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H: ...I'm a janitor. I work at the school, myself. I work at the school.

S: Mm-hm Oh. Uh-huh.

H: See. The white kid sit down and said, "My mother and my father told me", he said, tells me that they say, "Oh, you old black so-and-so, you-"

H: I said, "What your mama and daddy teach you?" "Yeah, call you 'old black niggers". I said, "Uh-huh. That's where you get this stuff from, your parents. "Yeah my mother and my father tells me, 'You all old black niggers.'" I said, "Listen." I said, "Don't you never get that in your head to call me a black nigger, hear", said, "I want you to hear. I tell him, "Don't you to get that in your head." I started to tell him, "You can go back and tell your teacher and you go on back and tell her what I said. Don't get that in your head to call me a black nigger, because you going to be out this--", I said, "You going get out of this door or either go down yonder."

S: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

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H: I said, "Don't get that in your head, now, cause, I'll tell you. I say, "I'll <gap> yeah. But I said, I said, "You get out of that hallway, now. Get off back down yonder to your room where you belongs at." I say, "Get this hallway clear." "Ok, Mr. Harris, ok, ok, ok."

S: Mm-hm.

H: <gap> So, I say, "uh-huh". I said where all this, where all this stuff come from. The white people sit down and teach the kids lot of this stuff, <gap> stuff.

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See they wasn't knowing but what the parents teach them. They wasn't knowing nothing about it.

S: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm-hm.

H: That's right. Parents got to teach them to do that.

S: Well they talk to you kind of freely then, huh?

H: Yeah, they talk to me. They tell me. I get after them about it, said, "Why ya'll do that?" I said, Ya'll know that's wrong." I said, you know, yeah. Have other kids, white kids. "Yeah, Mr. Harris", say, "You know I don't--my mama and my Daddy don't tell me nothing like that." <gap> I say, "naw". See that poor class of people, their parents teach, teach them that kind of stuff. The rich class of people on this side, the poor class on the other. Alright there's the rich man and, of course, white man, they ain't going call you--and I said,

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"Listen. This here. They call you by your name. You don't say that old nigger out yonder, "How you doing?" They won't say that.

S: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

H: So, they won't say that. Them poor class <gap> They'll tell you, say, "Look out here. Stay out of that trash, that bunch there. Don't fool with them. Don't play with them." That's what they tell their kids, "Don't play with that trash out there. Play with so-and-so." Keep their kids to that. They don't play with that nasty bunch. Well, might not, you know. The poor man ain't going to teach his kids that. The poor

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kids were low down stuff. Low down on race, you see. Yeah, that old son of a gun or poor old nigger there. They don't <gap> Colored people, way I see it.

S: Do you think Black people teach their kids not to like Whites?

H: No. They ain't that pre-, that prejudiced as the White people, the white kids. They ain't quite that bad, you know, like the White kids. See the White people's, under the White teachers. You got one Colored teacher and I say in one room, one building, had the one Colored teacher there in the whole building. All the rest of them White people. All White. Lot of these Whites, see, I done had <gap> Colored teacher <gap> They wanted to jump on her and she come to my house. All the--most of the Colored kids had a meeting that night and they fired her, because she speak up for her rights. They didn't want get the kids--to teach the kids the Black History and she wanted to teach it. They <gap> But <gap> and they fired that Colored teacher, fired the teacher. Mm. She come to my house

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that evening <gap> going to school, going to school, one of my kids was going to --all of them going to the same school, but I <gap> sixth grade. And he asked her, whether, "Will ya'll speak up" and I said, 'Yeah, I'll do what I can.'. I said, "There's something wrong here." My kid said, "Yeah, we going to the meeting tonight. We going to get up and speak for the <gap>, for the protection of rights. I said, "Yeah, I don't blame you." And what the White people said, the White women said nobody'd ever want her there, don't want her there. I said, "Well, I'm going to tell you. If I were you, I wouldn't work there, I wouldn't teach, because the majority of the people don't want you there. I'd best I just quit and get me another job. Don't, first thing then another,

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something come up. I said, "You can't watch everybody." I said, "I'd rather quit. Right along. And she did, she quit. She went to back, went to Detroit and, see that's where she was staying, Detroit. I told her, I said to her, I said, "You can't watch people", I said, <gap> the white people, teachers, down here don't like you." Say, "You the only Colored teacher out here. Ain't no--You ain't got no voice."

S: Mm-hm. That's right.

H: That's right. That's--that's just <gap> quitting.

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S: How'd your children feel about her?

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H: Well, they didn't like that; They didn't like it the way they treated her. They didn't like that, cause they treated like her, she going to teach to the Black History to Colored, to Black kids. People didn't want it. See, that's way they didn't want it.

S: Mm-hm.

H: That's right. Yeah, we got some good Colored peoples. Some of us try kind of speak up for you, but more than the majority of them, they going to pull for the White people's side.

S: Yeah. You know, Ann Arbor's supposed to be kind of different, cause there aren't any big ghetto-like--

H: Yeah, this here and that there, whipping around, see.

S: Uh-huh.

H: Yeah, see.

S: You think that make a difference in race relations?

H: Yeah, it makes a lot of difference, see, people are, they <gap> They got a White supervisor, always a White

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supervisor and walk the floor. They used to have White girls to watch the floor, but still it, uh, <gap> two or three strikes on and they turn them all off. Ain't got no floor-walkers at all at these schools, cut them off. And these kids get in the halls and they do anything, now, where <gap>, the teacher, she see a boy or a girl down the hall, lined up down there, they be lined up. One get to fighting or arguing. Well, what <gap> that one going say this, that one going to say that, why, you don't know who it is. And if we ain't got some colored person out there for the, for to guard the little boy <gap> don't amount to nothing. They going to beat that White girl up, going beat that White boy. That police going believe that White boy or either that White girl's word. He going to take his word for it regardless what you know. I don't care if you did see it. You know you seed it, but still you done whip around and they'll kick you out of school; they ain't going to kick that White girl out of school. Nuh-uh. They won't do that. They <gap>, they trip around, put them back in there, but they won't put you back there. No, no. That's not right.

S: You must see a lot of that then.

H: Yeah, I sees it! You know, I sees it. Look right at it. Looking right at it. Lot of times. Yeah, they ask you sometimes, be right out there in the hall looking at it. Kick these two boys out. I said, boy jumped on the, the White boy to whip him. I went to the principal. I said, "Listen. Now, you know can deal right." I said, "You sent that Colored boy home. Why can't you send that White boy home?" Said, "You know that's not right. Could send both of them home, send both of them home <gap> I said, "no", I said, "I'm looking at it". He's mad with me, I think. I don't

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care who gets mad, I don't care.

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S: Yeah, yeah. Cause that's wrong.

H: Yeah, I know it's wrong, you see, but see they don't <gap> I said, "No, that's not right. Hm-mm. I tell the principal, I said, "No. You not right, huh-uh." So they sent both of them home. Better cut bout three days from school, before they come back to school. Yeah, looking at him. I tell him that's not right. <gap> do get both of them away from there.

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